

Tacoma Symphony balances inventive, tradition; violinist Caroline Goulding stands out

BY ROSEMARY PONNEKANTI FOR THE NEWS TRIBUNE

Inventive met traditional at the Tacoma Symphony concert Sunday in the Pantages Theater, both between pieces and within them. The orchestra bookended the afternoon program with a United States premiere by Portuguese composer Luis Tinoco that scattered musicians throughout the theater and the highly conventional “Reformation” symphony of Mendelssohn, while violin soloist Caroline Goulding injected the 112-year-old Sibelius concerto with imaginative sound.

After beginning the concert with an affirmation after the Paris attacks — the gunshot drums and determined brass of Copland’s “Fanfare for the Common Man” — director Sarah Ioannides slipped in a welcome change from the orchestra’s usual Romantic fare. “Before Spring,” a 2013 piece written as a commission to play as prelude to Stravinsky’s “Rite of Spring,” showed Tinoco as both a thoughtful and communicative composer. A recorded speech by the composer was followed by a 10-minute work that reworked Stravinsky’s language into a dreamy, cinematic landscape. Long tone clusters, exposed oboe, hovering flutes and staccato piano all nodded to the great work while creating another. Finally, with almost all the wind and brass section playing from throughout the auditorium, the piece surrounded the audience in a crescendoing cloud of discord — only to end with that iconic high C on bassoon, hinting at the masterpiece to come. The awed audience member who uttered a solo “Whoa!” after the baton dropped summed it up for all of us.

No less creative was violin soloist Caroline Goulding, who followed with the Sibelius concerto. Just 21, Goulding plays with an engaging effervescence, and if she lacked some power and occasional precision that was more than countered by her astonishing range. From the icy, non-vibrato opening theme to the passionate portamento sixths, from the G-string melody of the second movement — played hoarse and emotional like a 1940s chanteuse — to the crunchy, gypsy-ish spiccato gallop of the third, Goulding coaxed an orchestra of sound out of her Stradivarius. Behind her, the actual orchestra maintained support without overwhelming — an impressive feat.

Finally, after intermission came the evening’s symphony: Mendelssohn’s no. 5, the “Reformation,” written as a Lutheran celebration. Following Ioannides’ thoughtful crafting, the ensemble began with a triumphant first movement that was solid but not stodgy, continued with a dancing second movement and

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pleasant but uneventful third, and continued through the chorale and fugue of the fourth with a lightness of being and surety that Mendelssohn would have loved. A predictable but still enjoyable encore of the composer's "Wedding March" followed.

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